Conferences to Children on Practical Virtue

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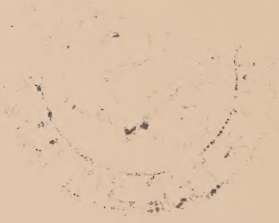

CONFERENCES TO CHILDREN

ON

PRACTICAL VIRTUE

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FROM THE FRENCH

OF

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NEW YORK

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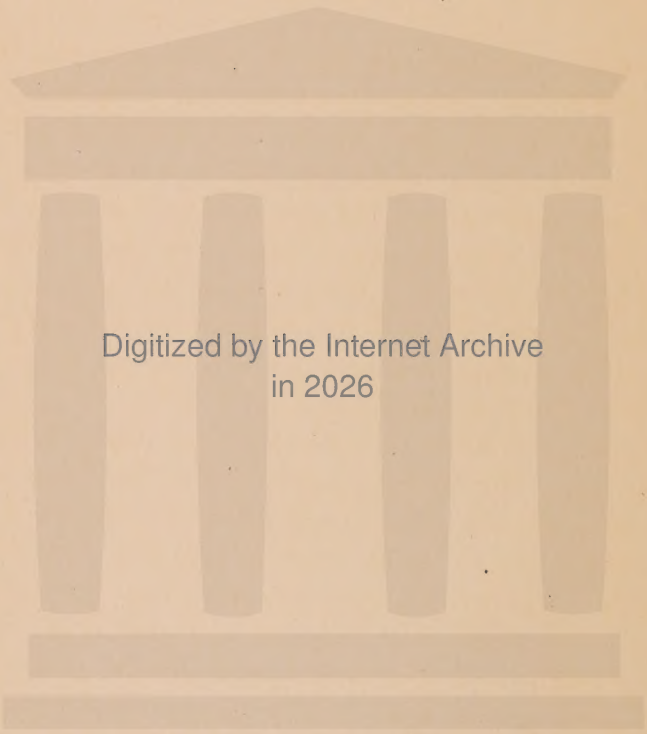
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Conferences to Children at Sunday School Meetings.

I.—Obedience.

Once upon a time there was an old schoolmaster, who at the beginning of the year, wrote the word *Obedience* in big letters upon the blackboard in his classroom, and this inscription remained there, before the pupils' gaze, for some time, as a reminder of their first and most important duty, the duty to obey. Obedience is not only necessary for being a good and virtuous pupil, but it is also the means of how to succeed in anything you undertake or do, at home, in church, at Sunday School, even at play, and you will need it particularly in that grand work which you have before you, the preparation for your first Holy Communion.

All the perfection which we ask of you is contained in that one word that was written on that blackboard, *Obedience.* Nor is this difficult to understand: You young people are necessarily kept under orders from some one or other; at home it is your parents; and you leave your parents' orders only when you come under the orders of your teachers or of the priest, so that there is hardly a moment in your day when you are not under orders to do something or other, and as you are never asked to do anything but good, the result is that if you obey you will always and without error do the right things.

Obedience is like a long road that leads through the country: sometimes the road is straight, sometimes winding, it turns to the

east or to the west, it may be up and down hills; it disappears beneath the shade of a forest, then reappears in the open; it skirts a precipice or lake. All this matters not. It is the road, and from the moment I take it I am certain of reaching the place to which it leads. This is obedience, and nothing more is needed than the intention, "I will obey," to make a child thoroughly good. There is a difficulty, however, that lies in the way of obeying, and it is a great one. To overcome it, remember that there are three qualities that make true obedience, and they are: You must understand, you must be willing, you must know how.

First of all, the understanding. Some children are like puppets—mechanical dolls—that are made to move by pulling a cord or by turning a crank; they, too, obey, but without sense. When pushed or pulled they move, and that is all. Do not be like these puppets. Let your obedience be a reasonable one; that is to say, make it clear to yourselves why you should obey this or that order.

Your youth and inexperience, for instance, are the chief reasons for obeying. What do you know? What can you do? Are you not greatly in need of being guided? Nor can you fail to know, from your own experience, that for want of advice, or maybe from disobeying orders, many small, and perhaps great mishaps have already befallen you. If you had minded when told not to overheat yourself by fast running, would you have caught that bad cold? Would you have cut yourself so badly if you had listened when your mother or father forbade you to play with knife or scissors? But even if you had the experience of age or the knowledge of a philosopher, you have not the privilege; you are subject to your elders, and if you oppose the authority of your parents and teachers you will be called little tyrants, and with good reason; a tyrant is

an unlawful monarch, an usurper; if you refuse to obey you are no better, the more so if you wish to be master purely for your own pleasure, to every one's annoyance, and to your own harm.

Let me tell you that obedience is imposed upon everybody, with the exception of God. There is not a created being in the universe who is not obliged to obey some one, or some thing. Nobody can always do as he pleases. Formerly there were mighty kings who said: We want things done according to our good pleasure. Louis XIV., King of France, was one of them, but when his armies suffered defeat in his wars, when the winter of 1709 brought great distress to France, the king realized that he could not do just as he pleased, and he humbled himself before God. Kings, princes, generals, priests, teachers, all mankind have their superiors whom they must obey, with greater reason therefore must you obey who are only little children.

Secondly, you must be willing to obey. There are persons who do not like obedience, because it means the doing of what others tell you, without asking your own inclination. These persons are mistaken. Obedience manifests, on the contrary, a great inclination to be good. Always to do just what others command is not easy. We love liberty so much! Liberty appeals to our pride; it is so pleasant not to be obliged to obey any one. The snake appealed to Eve's pride by telling her she would be like God, and that is why she disobeyed God's command. It is very pleasant, too, to do just as we like, to follow our inclinations. To obey we must overcome all this. Obedience requires great will power, a determined resolution often renewed; the utmost fidelity to prayer in order to obtain the strength necessary.

Do not imagine therefore that you can become obedient all at once without any trouble, neither be discouraged at your failures

in this respect, they are inevitable, and they will, no doubt, be frequent. Confess them sincerely, remembering that each act of disobedience is really a sin against God, for which you ought to be sorry with your whole heart, and then redouble your efforts, and you will surely make great progress.

Finally, you must know how to obey. There is a way of doing everything, and much depends upon the way a thing is done. The manner of giving is better than the gift itself. Suppose some one would give you a handsome book at Christmas, but at the same time would tell you, "I had to give you this present because it is customary, but I did not like to do it, it was expensive, and I could have used my money to better purpose."

You would reply: "Sir, take back your book, if you offer the gift in such a way I do not care to accept it."

To obey is to give; it is to give one's will to God, and to those who represent Him; it means to sacrifice one's pleasure and one's desires, and it is the manner of obeying which adds to or diminishes the merit of obedience.

There are three ways of obeying which are bad and which should be avoided:

There is, first of all, what I would call the manner of a whipped dog, or of a punished slave. That is the manner of those who obey when a hand is raised to strike, when they are threatened, but once the master's eye is no longer watchful and the fear of punishment is removed they think no longer of obeying.

This obedience does not deserve the beautiful name of obedience; what merit can it possess before God and before men? None whatever. It is only an act of fear, and as such it is unworthy of a Christian child.

There is, secondly, the insolent and rebellious manner. That is the manner of those who obey grudgingly, asking the reason why. The reasons given are disputed, they are found insufficient, objections are raised, they think obedience unnecessary, absurd, get angry, and pout, and finally obey, but with every possible sign of impatience and ill humor. This is not real obedience.

It suffices to know that we must obey, we have no right to ask for reasons and explanations from the one to whom we owe obedience.

Finally, there is a third faulty manner, and that is an obedience after the manner of the turtle or of the snail. This is the manner observed in those who intend to obey, who do not complain or get angry. But what a tardy obedience it is! How often must they be told to do a certain thing before they set about it, and when they do obey it is most slowly.

Be sure and avoid carefully all these defects. Obey promptly, cheerfully, silently, and then you may be quite certain of God's blessing, and, as Holy Scripture says, obedience will gain for you the victory.

II.—Work.

Children are often accused of idleness, and as a matter of fact it is a frequent failing with them. Seldom can children be held up to others as examples for being industrious. At the same time it must be admitted that the idleness of children is not an absolute neglect of work. They work, but how do they do their work? Many do it reluctantly, they do not like work. Very often they only work under pressure, or under threat of punishment, or, at least, to avoid censure, only desiring to finish as soon as possible, and to resume play and pastime. Now such work, although better than absolute idleness, is, nevertheless, a sort of idleness in disguise. Besides, it usually is unsatisfactory work, negligently done, never fully accomplishing the task, but only part of it.

You do learn your lessons, but you often do not know them as well as you should; you do write your exercises, but often hurriedly, a mere scribble, with bad penmanship and faulty spelling, probably leaving some of the work unfinished. This is the way in which you give in to idleness, although possibly it is not this kind of idleness for which you are most frequently censured.

The cause of your idleness is that you have an instinctive dislike of work, although you may be doing it, consequently the great remedy for your idleness would be to become not only resigned to work, as an unavoidable necessity, but to become even fond of it for its own sake, as something good.

Do you wish me to impart to you the secret how to become fond of work? It is not much of a secret, and I will tell you all about it.

The first means to become fond of work is to look upon work as a blessing from God.

It is often said that work is a punishment; this is true only to a certain extent.

Do we not read in the Bible that Adam after having been created by God was placed in the garden of Eden in order to work there? He had not yet sinned then, he was innocent and pure, and work, therefore, was not imposed as a punishment. In work there is indeed a large proportion of blessing and sweetness, although mixed with a certain amount of distress and labor as the consequences of sin. It is, however, a fact that in your work you look as a rule only at that which makes it hard and unpleasant and that is the reason why you do not like it. If instead of this you will look and examine and see that it is sweet and beneficial, you will end by liking it.

To begin with, work will save you from weariness. Supposing that you were exempted from work, what would you do? You would play. But at the end of an hour or two, would not play itself lose all interest for you? What then would the result be if you had nothing to do but to play all blessed day long? Or perhaps you would read. Yet, at your age, one tires of reading much sooner than of playing. What would there be left for you but to wander about, not knowing what to do, a prey to dissatisfaction and utter weariness? Ah, then indeed you would call work to your aid, and even welcome it with joy, as a blessing. Think this over, and cherish your work as a remedy against dissatisfaction and weariness.

Work, furthermore, protects you from sin: there is not a bad thought, no matter how wicked, that will not find plenty of idle minds willing to receive it. Idle heads and hearts are like uncultivated fields where the soil is never tilled or sown, and where rank weeds may flourish at leisure. The lazy child, in order to escape the weariness that has taken possession of him, and because he must needs have something to interest him, will probably rather

do wrong than right, because wrong is done so much more easily. The child who works earnestly, on the contrary, has neither the inclination nor the time to listen to the wicked suggestions of the evil one; his faculties are all occupied, and if bad thoughts knock at the door there is no one to answer and they cannot gain admittance. O, what a blessing is work! And while idleness has drawn many children into all kinds of sin, has caused them to grow up to become criminals, to spend their lives in prison, or even to suffer for their crimes the awful death decreed by law, how many, on the contrary, have been preserved and saved by work!

Therefore, my dear children, love your work, be cheerful and alert about it, as one taking refuge under a shelter where he will be perfectly safe from the wickedness of his enemies; be fond of work for this very reason.

Work not only preserves us from weariness and protects us from sin, but it is in itself a real and great gratification. You will perhaps tell me that it never appeared to you in that light. Well, this would be a proof that you have never worked thoroughly, for when we work in earnest and with our whole strength, when we enter into our work heart and soul, we most certainly earn from it great contentment. In working we are no longer our own masters, we are completely engrossed in what we are doing, the mind is so interested that time passes without our being aware of it. It is for this reason that men studying, or experimenting in their laboratories, sometimes spend days and nights at their work without heeding the passing of time, they hardly take the time to sleep or eat, and as soon as possible return eagerly to their books, or their experiments.

Work, therefore, has many great advantages, and is productive of much good; you should look at it from this point of view, and not regard it merely as an unpleasant duty.

Another reason why you should like work, induces me to refer to the particular position in which you find yourselves at this time; you are soon to make your first Holy Communion. Bear in mind that there is an infallible means to prepare your hearts thoroughly for this great act and to render them worthy of Jesus, and this means is work. This will in all probability astonish you at first, and you may be unable to perceive the relation between your first Communion and your daily work. How can your compositions, your problems in arithmetic, your lessons in history and geography, contribute in any way towards your preparation for first Holy Communion? It is nevertheless so, and simple enough, because all this is the duty of your state of life.

Remember that we do not become holy by prayer alone, nor by other devotional practices alone. God requires more than mere flowers and leaves. He requires fruit, that is to say, works. You have read the parable of the servant who buried the talent received from his master in the earth for fear of losing it. "Thou evil and slothful servant," the Lord said to him, "thou shalt be punished." Good intentions suffice not, each one must do his work. Your work, your particular duty, is the daily work required of you by parents and teachers, and if you do not accomplish this, all your devotion is but a pretense, all your good desires and intentions will count as nothing in God's eyes. If, however, you work faithfully in order to please him, each one of your days will be a fit gift to offer to Him, your merits will be increased, and divine graces will be showered upon your soul. Therefore you should like your work, as one of the chief means of attaining for your soul the blessing of a good first Communion.

Finally, another means for gaining a fondness for work, and one simple to practise, is to apply yourself to your work promptly with-

out dawdling, without pondering over its difficulties and without anticipating the fatigue which the work may have in store for you. Nothing paralyzes our efforts so much as calculating beforehand all the trouble which work may cost us, and this is what a great number of children are in the habit of doing. If they have three or four lessons to learn, they begin to figure out what time, what trouble it will take to do this, they doubtfully turn the leaves over one after another. Three, four hours of work, how tiresome! Much time is lost in these reflections, possibly more than the time needed to learn one of the lessons, and furthermore, this tardiness deprives you of what little courage you had, so that you finally set to work with dislike and lack of interest.

Begin your work promptly, on the moment, without paying heed to dislikes, and as soon as you have begun, this disagreeable feeling will wear away. This disagreeable feeling resembles the unpleasant sensation which you have when going into cold water for a bath, it is a matter of a few instants only, and soon you find the water delightful, and not at all disagreeable.

The three means to become fond of work are therefore: (1) to remember that it is a great blessing; (2) to remember that it is a duty; (3) to remember that promptness in undertaking work will quickly overcome the dislike for it.

This is the secret of becoming fond of work. I tell you the means, that you may make use of them, and that you may strive to like your work. Regard work as your friend, whose hands are filled with abundant good, take pleasure in its society, be faithful to it, and it will never fail to be your most faithful and helpful friend.

III.—Piety.

The word piety is often mentioned to you, my dear children, and you are frequently exhorted to practise the virtue of piety. It must therefore be a familiar word to you, but have you a precise idea of what it means? What is your idea of a pious child? Is a pious child one who says thoughtlessly many prayers, many rosaries, who likes to wear medals because they look pretty, or perhaps, one who, while praying in church, raises his eyes heavenward because he wants people to think well of him? No, that is not true piety. Piety is something more than outward appearance; it is a flame burning in the heart, an enthusiasm of the soul, causing us to be fervent in all things pertaining to God and our holy religion. Piety is a taste for religious practice, piety is an uplifting of the soul towards heaven. A truly pious child is not known by the number of prayers he says, but by the fact that he says them carefully and devoutly. He delights in speaking to God, to his Father in heaven; in opening his heart to his great and divine Friend Jesus. The Church is for him a place well beloved, he likes to enter there to spend a few moments before the tabernacle. The little sanctuary lamp, hanging before the altar and guarding the dwelling of the Lord, fills his soul with deep emotion, it reminds him of the eternal light enjoyed by the blessed in heaven. The ceremonies of the Church forcefully attract the truly pious child. The altar decorated and illumined, the priests vested with the sacred robes and officiating at the sacred functions, the singing, the ringing of the bells, the profound silence attending that supreme moment during Mass when Jesus descends upon the altar, all this makes a deep impression on this child's heart and fills it with delight.

Now let us enter the pious child's little room. You will find there a crucifix at the head of the bed, and in a prominent position a little statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and there will probably be other proofs of his devotion. A pious child takes care of all these things, he looks with great pleasure upon these sacred objects and says his prayers before them night and morning. He is diligent also about the Catechism, because the hours of religious instructions are devoted to speaking of God, he learns to love Him there, to serve Him better, to sing His praises, there he spends an hour or two entirely in His service and it charms the mind of the pious child.

Do you understand now by this description of what true piety consists? It is a longing, a hunger, so to speak, for the sacred things of God, and for God Himself.

Thus you can see what a grand thing piety is. Some foolish persons ridicule those who are pious, but see to it that you never fall into this sinful habit, which is at the same time an injustice.

"Tell me with whom you associate, and I will tell you what you are," says the proverb. By piety we associate with God, through piety we become intimate with God, it makes us His beloved friends. A pious soul necessarily becomes a friend of God, of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, of the saints. What noble company! What could possibly be a greater honor than to move in such society? If you were on terms of friendship with a royal prince so that he invited you to his table, and received your confidence, you would certainly consider yourself highly honored by such friendship and you would not fail to boast of it. And here it is the Lord Himself who thus honors you, and those who through piety are in constant communication with God have therefore far greater reason for joy.

Take care, then, never to ridicule or disdain those who are more

pious than you are, and, on the other hand, never yield to a foolish fear of showing your piety in the proper time and place, even if on that account some wicked or stupid people should make their remarks about you. Remember that Our Lord was scorned, and that He will reward you if you are scorned in serving Him.

I wish to put you on your guard against a threefold delusion concerning piety.

The first delusion is that of imagining that you are sufficiently pious. Some girls and boys no doubt are very pious, but the greater number should be a great deal more pious than they are. There are in your midst children who are fairly attentive, fairly good, fairly diligent, who may even do their religious duties thoroughly and conscientiously enough, but this is not real piety, because piety is enthusiasm, fervor, zeal, and there many of you are lacking.

It is painful to admit it but it is nevertheless true, that piety in these days is scarcer amongst children than it was formerly. The reason is because you are brought up too indulgently, with too much ease; you are often allowed to assume a habit of arguing, of fault finding about things of which you have not the proper understanding, and under such conditions piety has difficulty in finding a place in your hearts, for it presupposes a simplicity of mind and willingness of heart. However the case may be, it is necessary for you not to persuade yourself that you are sufficiently pious.

The second delusion is found in the erroneous belief which some people have that piety is not absolutely necessary and that you need not trouble yourselves with acquiring it. Do you then expect to make your first Holy Communion without real piety? The very mention of such a thing is sufficient, I hope, to fill you with consternation. A First Communion without piety! As well speak of a hearth without fire, of a day without light, a summer without sun.

Holy Communion is the supreme act of piety. Piety, as I told you just now, is a sort of divine hunger for God and the things of God. Now when should we experience this longing if not at the moment when God offers Himself as food to our souls? If Jesus carries His love so far as to come to us with such great love and charity, is it possible that we should go to meet Him with indifference, devoid of emotion, with a cold and unmoved heart?

No, you will understand easily enough that for such a sublime act great piety is indispensable.

The third delusion is that piety will come of itself, without an effort to acquire it. A great error indeed. The apostle St. Paul said to his disciples: "Practise piety," and this, as well as our habit of calling our devotions pious *practices,* is proof that piety is something that must be *practised.*

Piety is acquired and developed only by constant practice. If you wish to become really pious, my dear children, you must set to work upon it, you must strive, in the first place, to say your prayers carefully and with attention, to assist devoutly at holy Mass, to say your prayers every morning and night, to think of God and the saints frequently during the day, especially when doing important things and when in temptation, to visit the church when possible, and to say the Angelus when you hear the bell. These are some of the principal exercises of piety, the very practices that sanctified the saints, and which still sanctify innumerable souls. These practices have lost nothing of their efficacy. Practise them, and you will feel by degres your souls rise toward heaven and take wings, as it were, to fly toward God. And then these practices of piety which at first, perhaps, appeared to you monotonous and tiresome, will gradually become pleasant. The nearer you approach

to Jesus, the more you will experience how sweet is His yoke and how light His burden, and the more you will long for that blessed day when with great and joyful piety you will receive the loving Lord and Saviour into your heart, to remain there, let us fervently hope, until your piety is finally rewarded by your admission to the eternal bliss and joy of heaven.

IV.—Kindness.

In speaking to you of kindness I am reminded of a great writer who claimed that children knew no pity. He had just been witness to a boy despoiling a nest of linnets, treating the helpless little birds with great cruelty. And this opinion is often repeated because it is too often true. As a matter of fact kindness is not often met with amongst children. Many of them are selfish, thinking only of their own welfare, never of that of others; there are others even who are really malicious and take pleasure in doing harm to persons, animals and things. It is true that much of this may be due to a want of reflection and of experience, natural at your age. Many are selfish and inconsiderate without meaning to be so exactly, for want of understanding that they cause suffering. You have not as yet suffered much, perhaps not at all, and this is why you are indifferent to the sufferings of others, you do not appreciate what suffering means. Later on, after you have grown up, and will in your turn have passed through trials and sufferings, you will understand better the sufferings of your fellow creatures, and kindness and pity will not be strange to you. But while lacking the actual experience you are by no means excused from combating your natural evil propensities, and from practising kindness. It is indeed one of your important duties. Remember that you are soon going to receive Him who is called the *merciful* God.

This mercy of God manifests itself so much in the life of the Divine Jesus. How kind Jesus was! kind in His welcome to all men, to the sick, to the sinners; kind in His words, ever tinged with mercy and compassion: kind in His actions, which tended to cure the sick, console the afflicted, feed the hungry.

Remember above all how kind He was to little children! how

tenderly He embraced them and blessed them, and how graciously He invited them with the words "Suffer the little children to come unto me." And how kind He will be to you on the day of your first Communion, so good, indeed, as to give Himself wholly to your souls, in order to lavish upon you all His graces and blessings.

But how could you venture to approach this good and kind God if your hearts are hard and unkind? How could this Jesus who is kindness itself, take delight in the souls of children where uncharitableness dwells?

If kindness is the essential attribute of God, malice, on the contrary, is Satan's chief quality. To do wrong, to be bent upon injuring others, to destroy, to deface things, to take pleasure in seeing tears shed, and to enjoy lamentations and groans, is the delight of the devil.

He is called the evil one and he is the father and the teacher of all those who are malicious and wicked. You should therefore have a horror of evil and malicious doings, and if you find in yourself any inclination for them be on your guard, and shun even the least sins of this kind. It is so infamous, so mean, so disgraceful to take pleasure in the suffering of others! Is it not horrible to torture animals to amuse yourself by seeing them suffer? It is certainly the sign of an evil mind, and experience teaches that whoever has no feeling for the dumb beast, neither has he any for his fellow men.

One of the most cruel of the Roman emperors had, as a boy, found pastime in catching flies and pulling out their wings; in this manner he learned to enjoy cruelty, and when emperor he satisfied his evil and fiendish inclinations by torturing and killing his subjects. In contrast to this, let me tell you of a little girl who one day entered the confessional. The priest saw that she was

in tears and he had considerable difficulty in finding out the cause of her trouble as the child sobbed with all her might and could only utter words disconnectedly. At length, however, the priest learned that she accused herself of having killed, on first impulse, a little bird that had fallen from the nest. This cruel act immediately caused her sorrow; she was so ashamed of herself, that she hastened to unburden her conscience of what she considered a crime. Ever since she has had great consideration for animals. I hope that you will imitate this little girl, and not the ferocious emperor of whom I told you before.

With far more care you must avoid doing harm, or causing suffering to your brothers and sisters, or to companions. To treat others brutally, to strike or injure them, to knock them down, these are actions which can only be accounted for as originating in an ugly and malicious disposition, of which one should be ashamed. Sometimes, no doubt, such nasty actions begin in play, and becoming heated, a butt is made of one of your companions, several array themselves against him, overpower him, tears flow, and that seems sport to the others; they insult and mock him and the more he suffers the better pleased the others are.

Such behavior as this is by no means a rare occurrence, and really shows the savage in you. Those who witness such treatment are saddened by it, and as for yourselves, if such incidents with all their details were photographed by snapshot, you would at once see that you have very little to be proud of in taking the part of an inhuman persecutor. Therefore avoid brutal and boisterous behaviour and make up your mind, once for all, to do harm to no one.

Yet this is not enough; do not be satisfied to avoid brutality and to combat your quick impulses, strive also to practise kindness. Do all the good you can, to everybody. In the same degree as

unkindness is ugly, so kindness is attractive, and there is really no one who does not sometimes feel inclined to practise it. "When God made the heart of man He placed in it, first of all, kindness," says the great writer Bossuet. That is why, although we may have become wicked in consequence of sin, there still remains in us an inclination towards kindness. Obey this inclination and develop it, allow yourselves to be borne along by the delight which one experiences in doing good. It is truly a great inner satisfaction, and at the same time kindness secures for us the sympathy and affection of those about us, and this worldly advantage is not to be despised, either. Let your thoughts be kindly, judge others with kindliness.

Be kind in your talk; use kind words to your good parents. Children sometimes unwittingly grieve the hearts of their fathers and mothers. "My boy is fairly good," said a mother to me the other day, "but I do not know whether he loves me, he never says anything kind to me." Speak kindly also to your companions, be polite and pleasant to inferiors, and to the poor.

In conclusion, prove your kindness, furthermore, by doing many a gracious act, such as rendering trifling services to friends, to fellow pupils at Sunday school. Give, when allowed to do so, little presents, give alms, visit sick friends with your parents' permission, or write letters to them, etc. If you mean to practise kindness, and if you earnestly strive to do good, the opportunity will certainly not be wanting. Just as in calling God merciful we are attributing to Him His great goodness, so if you deserve that it be said of you that you have a kind heart, it will mean that you are good and it will bestow upon you the highest praise possible, because a kind heart will love God and its neighbor, and thereby fulfil the greatest of the commandments.

V.—Mortification.

The word mortification conveys an unpleasant meaning; it indicates every kind of restraint that we can impose upon ourselves, either in the fulfilling of our duties, or with the purpose of correcting our faults, of making amends for sins committed, or of making progress in holiness, because mortification serves all these various ends. There is a distinction to be made between interior and exterior mortification.

The first consists in the violence we do to ourselves, in order to direct and control our mind, our memory and imagination, to forbid to ourselves bad or useless thoughts and desires, and to supervise and discipline in general all the acts and sentiments of the soul.

Exterior mortification comprises the privations, restrictions, punishments, that one may inflict upon body or senses; the eyes or ears, the taste, touch, or smell. To refrain from looking at something which we may properly enjoy, to shut our ears when curiosity would have us listen; to deprive oneself of some sweet dish, candies, or at least to take less than would be allowed to us; to hold oneself erect instead of indulging in an easy or comfortable attitude; all these are practices of bodily mortification, and there are numerous others, for which our daily life offers opportunities.

As already mentioned, all this is not pleasant to contemplate; we all have an instinctive horror of restraint and we should much prefer to listen to something else and more pleasant than the disciplining of senses and sentiments. Perhaps you fall into the error of believing that mortification does not concern you, that it is a thing for devout persons alone, those eager for sanctity, or for those who retire into convents to do penance, like the monks and sisters; as for

yourself, it suits you better to think that such austerities are not for such as you.

It is true, that it is not for you to imitate the severe penances of these holy souls, but it does not follow that a little mortification is not wholesome even for children such as you are; in fact, mortification is of the greatest benefit to you.

Let us consider why this is so. First of all, I am not aware that our Saviour Jesus Christ made a single exception when He said: If any one would come after me, let him renounce himself and carry his cross." This law is absolutely general, it applies to all, not excepting even children, otherwise our Lord would not have failed to tell us so.

Besides, it could not be different. Why must we renounce ourselves and carry our cross under penalty of not being the disciple of Jesus Christ? Because it is the means necessary to avoid sin. We all are born with bad inclinations; there are within us the roots of all evil always ready to yield a harvest of every kind of sin.

If you search your soul, what do you find there? Be sincere about it! You find there for instance the root of pride, of envy and jealousy; then there is the root of idleness or that of gluttony.

Why do you get angry the moment you are bidden to do something? Why do you sulk? Why do you toss your head and look disdainfully at companions whom you consider inferior to yourself? Why are you proud of new clothes or hat, and of your finery? This same pride begets in you a number of foolish thoughts, of absurd pretensions, of harsh words; thus you commit many sins, and what will happen in the future if you do not combat this pride, if you do not *mortify* it? Pride is the father of all vices; there is no crime that it can not produce, and, beginning with Satan, the fallen angel, almost all bad people began their wickedness with indulging in sinful

pride. Again, why are you so long about rising in the morning? Why take so long to dress? Why this horror of work? Why do you not know your lessons? Why are your exercises badly written? Why this greediness, this unseemly behavior at table? Why this secret pilfering of cake or candy?

These are the fruits of laziness and gluttony. You have no energy, you think of nothing but your comfort, your beloved self, you recoil from making the least effort. Yet if you do not declare war upon these baleful inclinations, if you do not mortify them, already so productive of many sins, to what will they lead you later on? If an unfortunate person ventures upon quicksand or swamp he sinks, because there is no solid foundation; he sinks deeper and deeper; his limbs and feet become imprisoned in sand or sticky mud, he has no support, he sinks gradually to his chest, to his shoulders, his mouth, his eyes, he suffocates and is completely submerged. This is the picture of the child who is indolent, and does not combat his indolence; he is swallowed up gradually in the mire of sin and vice until his mind and heart are buried and suffocated. It is for you a question of life or death of your immortal soul, and mortification means the life and health of the soul, just as moderation in natural cravings means the health of the body.

The body itself is the better off for proper mortification; the physicians agree, for instance, that the restraints practised in Lent benefit the health of the body, as they should that of the soul. Do not, therefore, be scared when you are exhorted to mortify yourselves; remember that your welfare is at stake.

There is another good reason for mortification which should appeal strongly to your young hearts, and that reason is piety, and love of God. A child who really loves God, and who has an ardent desire to make a good First Communion cannot help feeling in-

stinctively what a beneficial thing mortification is and how efficacious for this end.

He will recall the faults he has committed, he will detest them with his whole heart because they form an obstacle to his perfect union with our good Lord; his greatest wish is to be cleansed from his sins, he desires to do penance for them. He shows his deep sorrow for having offended God by depriving himself of some little pleasures, or by inflicting upon himself other restrictions in the way of voluntary expiation.

This child knows that his sacrifice is agreeable to God, not only because it shows a sincere repentance, but because it is also a proof of love. To love is to give; we should therefore give something tc God, something which costs an effort in the giving, a sacrifice, a deprivation, a restraint, and this is why many little boys and girls, without anyone being aware of it, refuse themselves dessert at table, desist from speaking at certain times, impose upon themselves strict attention at Catechism or in class; rise in the morning at an earlier hour, or practise self mortification in other little ways.

Very likely no one about them notices this. So much the better, as vanity might spoil it all. God sees it, the angels register faithfully all these little sacrifices, which become so much accumulated wealth, the revelation of which is reserved for the day of judgment to be transformed on that day into a great glory for those good children. In the meantime as a temporary reward for these sacrifices, God lets His graces flow abundantly upon these pious and active little souls, and they may rest asured that their First Communion will be holy and fruitful of all graces.

And this is how mortification, at first repulsive, becomes to good children acceptable and even pleasant and desirable.

Set to work then courageously! Do not be so fond of your ease,

do not give way to indolence, let not a day pass without making some little sacrifice; give to God a share of your daily pleasures and recreation.

Those of you who enjoy the conveniences of life, remember the many children who lack many things, pleasures, leisure, clothes, delicacies, or, horrible thought, even their daily bread, and then you will not hesitate to deprive yourself once in a while of cakes or candies, and ask permission of your parents to give some alms to the poor and needy.

Remember how our Lord Jesus Christ endured so many privations, from the first to the last day of His life; compare your cosy little bed to the piteous crib at Bethlehem, your comfortable room to the plain house at Nazareth, your pleasures and leisure to the hard work and privations of the boy Jesus in the shop of Joseph the carpenter. Remember also, the cruel sufferings of Jesus in His Passion, and His painful death upon the Cross, and if you have a sorry feeling at all, you will be almost embarrassed at finding yourself so well cared for, when Jesus lived a life of work and privation, and you will not wish to approach Him, or to become invited to Him in Holy Communion, without resembling Him at least by some small practices of mortification.

VI.—Little Apostles.

Selfishness is a mean fault. It consists, you know, in keeping everything to oneself, refusing to share what we have with others. Now nothing can be more unjust; as we ourselves have so much need of the help of others. From morn till night you live only by the help of *others; others* give you the benefit of their knowledge for your instruction. *Others* give you their attention, or their labor to serve you, feed you, care for you. What would become of the selfish person if left without the assistance of others? He would perish miserably. A great writer says: "We must help one another; it is the law of nature."

You must, therefore, avoid selfishness; you must avoid it in everything, you must willingly let others share, as far as you possibly can, in whatever good things you may have. But above all you must avoid selfishness, when there is question of the goods of the soul, the grace of God, faith, goodness and virtue. These are blessings which we must not enjoy selfishly, when we possess them, we should desire to communicate them to others, and this desire is called by a beautiful name; it is called *the apostolate.*

An apostle! you immediately picture to yourself St. Peter and St. Paul, those sublime heroes, who at the command of Jesus Christ went throughout the world, founded the primitive churches, and consummated their labors by a glorious martyrdom; or you picture to yourself those missionaries, who, tearing themselves away from their dearest relatives, go to farthest Africa or to the ends of the world preaching the Gospel to pagans at the risk of their lives, and amidst untold hardships.

And you say to yourself: This does not concern me, there is nothing of the apostle about me; later perhaps, if God should call

me to the life of a missionary I would be willing to become an apostle; but now I need not think about it.

You are mistaken, for there are many ways of being an apostle. If the way of St. Peter and St. Paul, or that of the missionary is not for you, you ought nevertheless be an apostle in your own little way.

Whoever enjoys certain graces of God and does not desire to share them with others, is, indeed, a very selfish Christian. Whoever, on the contrary, renounces this ugly disposition, and is not only solicitous for those about him, but even strives to help them do good, becomes at once an apostle; a little apostle, unknown, of most modest undertakings, but an apostle all the same. The question therefore is this: Are you willing to be a selfish child or an apostle? There is no middle way, take your choice. You will not hesitate in choosing, you will decide to be an apostle. You will make this choice to please God, who asks it of you. God is our Father, and from His home in heaven He regards us all as forming His large family. And so He does not wish that we should lose interest in one another. To each one of us, as Holy Scripture tells us, He has confided the care of his brother; it is His will that we should aid one another in all things and chiefly in those things which concern the interests of our souls.

You will decide to be apostles also in response to the desire of Our Lord Jesus Christ who so loves souls that He sacrificed Himself unto death, for their salvation, and who has nothing so much at heart as their salvation. He wishes the salvation of your own soul, but He wishes none the less the salvation of your friends' souls. What delight it would cause Him if you helped, no matter how slightly, in the progress or conversion of some of these souls so dear to Jesus.

Finally, you will desire to be apostles because you are generous, and there is nothing so captivating and so attractive to a generous mind as to do good to others.

It remains for me now to tell you what the conditions are for exercising this apostolate. Towards whom should you exercise it? Without doubt towards all those in general who approach you.

However, it is befitting to have in view particularly your companions, your associates, whether at play, at work, or, and particularly so, at Catechism. There is your field of apostleship! that suffices. In some families where religion is less respected, a child may now and again excite his ambition and apostolic zeal so far as to strive for the conversion of his dear parents. There have been instances where little boys, or little girls during the year of their first Communion set themselves to this great work with their whole hearts, and successfully won the victory by force of prayer, and, at times, of heroic sacrifices.

May the example of these real little apostles stir you up when the opportunity presents itself.

You ought to be apostles one towards the other, seeking the mutual welfare of your souls, their progress, their sanctification, and always their more perfect preparation for first Communion.

What means should you make use of?

In the first place *good advice.* Advice given in season may be of great service, and at times the advice of a companion is more efficacious than that of a superior. But to do this several conditions are necessary: First there must be question of a companion over whom you feel you have a certain influence, one who shows a liking for you, so that you have reason to hope that he will listen to you.

In the second place you must use good judgment in the manner of giving advice, you must, as the saying is, always "sugar the pill" a

little, ever bearing in mind that a reproof is always unpleasant in itself, and consequently it is well to mix considerable sweetness with it. It must not appear as an interference, especially between companions, neither should you assume a protecting or dictatorial manner, but rather to offer advice in the form of a reflection, of a question, or of a pleasant word skilfully dropped in conversation.

The second means to do good one to another, and to practise being apostles, is *good example*. This is a far superior way, because in the first place we can always make use of it, whilst advice is at times not agreeable. Again it is much more efficacious. The power of example is irresistible, because we are naturally inclined to do what we see others do. There is no better sermon than the sight of a really good child, very pious, modest, obedient to his teachers, and industrious. This little child, without opening his mouth, preaches the whole day long. "We will go out and preach," said St. Francis of Assisi one day to one of his brethren, and accordingly they both set forth. They passed through the streets of Assisi, and Francis remained silent. He just lowered his eyes and prayed as he walked. After an hour's time the two religious re-entered the convent, and the brother said to Francis: "Did you not go out to preach?" "What else did we do?" replied the saint; "every one who saw us heard the best sermon that we could have preached to them; that of example."

Be therefore very modest, very attentive, very good, not only for your own sake, but in order to gain your companions over to the right way. Then you will be apostles.

You will be so also by *prayer*. You must pray one for another. Our Lord Himself taught us to say *Our Father* and not *My Father*. It is chiefly in the presence of God, that we ought to recall

the ties of family which unite us, and it is particularly the asking for our daily bread that should be made in the spirit of unity. You are all about to partake of the same holy Bread. You are all about to sit at the same sacred table with hearts united. You should ask for the graces necessary to prepare for that great day.

When you pray for a good first Communion you should never exclude your companions; they should be ever present to your mind and you should recommend them to God the same as yourself.

These are the principal practices of the apostolate which we preach to you. If you are faithful to them you will be the first to gain by them, for God delights to lavish His most precious favors upon those who by the practice of zeal become His co-workers in the great work of the saving of souls.

VII.—Character.

Dear Children.—You often hear the word character used, in fact you hear it mentioned almost daily. Now what does this word character mean? Has it reference to your mind, your heart, or your intentions, is it an independent part of yourselves? No, indeed. Your character is composed of all these, it is yourself, your personality, or to speak more plainly, it is the distinctive mark of your personality. There is some particular mark which distinguishes every one from his neighbor, and that is what we call *character.*

For instance, the boy called James has about him a certain way which is not the manner of his comrades Peter or John. And this mark, or certain way, is called character.

Character consists in distinctly personal traits or qualities. There are children who are *nobody in particular,* and there are others who are *everybody;* such children have no character.

Could it be said of a lazy little boy that he is *somebody?* No, indeed, he is too indolent, he is not interested in anything except, to be sure, the hour of sleep, or of meals. To what shall we compare such a child? To those creatures of inferior order, neither flesh nor fish, of no particular shape, found along the seashore. What distinct marks do they show? It is hard to tell. So is that child. How are we to *characterize* him? What shall we say of him, to describe him? Only one thing unfortunately can be said, and that is, he has no character, there is nothing striking about him; he is "nobody" in particular.

It would, on the other hand, not be difficult to find others who are similarly without character, because they are "Master Everybody." Such children, no doubt, are lively, active, full of spirits, even ambi-

tious; if you were to see them for a day or two, or even for a few weeks, you might suppose you knew what they really are. But, alas, a few days longer and we find them totally changed, they change minds, habits, friends, you would hardly know them from one time to another. Here you have "Master Everybody." To-day pious, good, studious; to-morrow, unbearable, inattentive, negligent; the day after to-morrow he is all for play, the next after that all work; then once again all piety. One day he is affectionate and kind to parents and teachers, another day tired of everything, desirous only of having a good time. Why these incessant changes? I will tell you why. This child is too easily led by the example and advice of others. Master "Everybody" always does what the *others* do; he thinks like the *others,* the *others* are his sole rule of conduct. And among the *others* not all are formed alike, as there are amongst them good and bad, industrious and idle, tractable and untractable. Master "Everybody" is all this in succession, according to the influence of the momentary companion.

It is not at all necessary that this influence be protracted or very marked; at times a word suffices, a reflection, a smile, a word of advice, an invitation, a wish of some kind expressed. This poor child without character, is like the clouds of heaven, every instant changing form, color, velocity and destination, according to the vagaries of the blowing wind. Here, then, is the portrait of Master "Everybody" against that of Master "Nobody."

You will all agree that it would not be flattering to resemble either of these two. One is as bad as the other. Neither of these unfortunate weaklings deserve anything but pity. If you realize this thoroughly you will not care to resemble either of them for anything in the world.

Dear children, you must strive with all your might to acquire

character. You will acquire it, if, in the first place, you strive to overcome laziness, and to cultivate by work the talents which God has bestowed upon you. Then there will be a chance for you to become "some one." However, this will not suffice. You must also seek a deep and solid religious knowledge.

To possess character, we must have convictions and principles, we must be convinced of what our duties are and of the reasons for fulfilling these duties.

Why is it that the child mentioned in the second place is always led by others? Because he has no "ideas" of his own on the matters before him, he is not convinced. If, for instance, he were thoroughly convinced, that he was in duty bound to love and serve God, would he let himself be easily moved by the ridicule of companions who tease him about his piety? On the contrary, he would feel sorry for a companion who could be ignorant enough, or silly enough, not to know or understand, how good, sweet, beneficial and necessary it is to draw near to God, by prayer and devotional exercises.

You must, therefore, be convinced of your duties, and you will become so only by getting instructed in the truths of religion. Religion will teach you the things that are true and certain, and if you believe them with your whole heart and with a strong faith, you will surely become men and women of character.

There is one more condition, however—the last and most important—you must ask God for His grace. It is not enough to know your duty. You must also have the courage to fulfil it. Only the grace of God can give us this courage. Work, faith and prayer, will build up in us a true Christlike character, such as will make good and honorable men and women out of you, beloved by God and by men.

VIII.—On Good and Bad Character.

It is not sufficient to have *character,* we must have a *good character.* The word character has several meanings in the English language, but we shall here only make use of two of them. In the first place character is personality, and in the second it is habitual temper, also called the disposition. To have a *good* character is to be habitually good tempered; to have a bad character is to be habitually bad tempered. It is not a rare occurrence to meet children who have a bad character—their temper is bad.

The peculiarity of a bad temper is that it will suffer no contradiction of any sort. Behold, for instance, the boy of about ten years, center of a group of playmates, he is talking excitedly; they listen, and one of them at length ventures to raise an objection; it seems the rules of their game are not precisely so as the boy claims they are. The objection at once arouses his ire, he gets red in the face, and becomes aggressive. And all this fuss over some trifling rule of baseball. This boy, by getting hot-headed over such a trifle has given proof of his bad and ugly temper.

Soon calm is restored, the tempest is over, the game is started, but in a very short while some other thing, it would perhaps be hard to tell just what, puts this bad-tempered boy again out of humor, and this time he becomes abusive, to the surprise and disgust of some of his playmates, while others who have known him some time are inclined to make fun of him; finally he quits the game and goes off to sulk by himself.

This is a case of a little boy, but I wish to point out that little girls are no less given to fits of temper than are little boys.

Our young friend goes home discontented and complaining; his

mother asks him what the trouble is, but either he gives no answer at all or mumbles some unintelligible words. He is reprimanded for his rudeness, and again gets angry, he leaves the room slamming the door. At supper he does not speak; pouting and with bad grace he kisses his parents good night, and when finally he has gone to bed the family breathes a sigh of relief, for that child is unbearable except when asleep.

Dear children, there are two words which may be well applied to this sort of bad temper: it is absurd, and intolerable. If you wish to have these words applied to yourself, then allow yourself to be carried away by your bad temper, and you will not fail to merit one or the other, or both. You will make yourself absurd, because there is nothing so silly as those foolish fits of rage about trifles, as that mania for quarreling, that sensitiveness about the smallest trifles, it reminds one of a young puppy that barks furiously at nothing all day long. Everybody laughs at the carrying on of such a little dog, and so every one, too, laughs at the impotent and foolish fits of passion displayed by persons of bad temper.

You will, moreover, be as intolerable as you are absurd, for nothing is more unpleasant than to live with persons of an embittered or touchy disposition, even the most sincere affection can not bear it long; the person with a bad temper is shunned, he is without friends, disliked or dreaded by all.

This is the fate that awaits you, if you do not strive with all your might to control your defects of character. I think this description is well calculated to move you to serious efforts to acquire an amiable disposition. Besides, you must remember that you have not the right to be disagreeable or even intolerable—Christian charity forbids it. We are to live together as one family. We are to render mutual service, one to another, either for the good of the soul, or

for that of the body. Persons, who by their ugly disposition render themselves objectionable and intolerable, exclude themselves from the great Christian family, they are an obstacle to that unity and good will which ought to prevail among the disciples of Jesus Christ, and consequently they are lacking in the Saviour's chief precept: Love one another.

You must not think that to have a bad temper does not matter so much; on the contrary, the consequences of a bad temper are often very serious, because as we have just explained they destroy peace and cause disharmony and quarrel. You will, when you grow up, notice that whenever there is much disputing, rancor, and difference of opinion among people, or even among the members of a family, it is generally because of the bad dispositions of one or two persons who, by their exactions, their bitter words, their silly sensitiveness have upset everything and antagonized everybody.

Nor must you think that we can not help our disposition, nor claim it sufficient excuse, when you have committed a fault, to say: "How can I help it? that is my disposition."

No; you must improve and correct your character; that is one reason why you attend Sunday-school, and learn your Catechism. At your age it can be done, and it is even easy of accomplishment. But if you wait until grown up, it is quite certain that the task will be a difficult one; but just now with God's grace, with the guidance of your parents, and the instructions which you receive here, all the task requires is a little good will.

Start then the good work; the character of many children is like a young broncho, wild and difficult to get hold of, yet this can be accomplished if you know how to throw or lasso it like the cowboys out West, and to apply the spur if necessary. Neither lasso nor spur will injure the broncho, but on the contrary render him useful in

time; he will soon become docile and easy of control, and so it is with your temper, your character. The lasso with which to subdue your disposition is your will, and the spur is mortification. Apply your firm will to the task, and mortify that foolish pride that would rebel against imagined slights and reasonable opposition, and you will soon have your temper under control and will gain the reputation of having a good and amiable character.

IX.—Conscience.

In one of our fairy tales the story is told of a fairy who presented a little girl with a wonderful watch. This watch had the peculiarity of indicating to the little girl the path she should take on all her journeys. When she was on the right road the watch ticked so softly that it was like a caress whose sweetness the child felt interiorly; when she strayed from the path, immediately the watch increased its ticking, becoming louder and louder till the traveler could not help listening to its warning.

Dear children, we do not live in the days of fairies, and yet we possess, each one of us, no less marvelous a watch, which ticks within us; this watch is our conscience. Our conscience shows us the right path, the path that is best, the path of virtue and goodness. If you walk in that path, then the ticking of conscience is unspeakably sweet to hear and to feel. It is like a delightful whisper, your conscience encourages you, and approves of your conduct. You feel a great contentment, you are pleased with yourself and the world, you feel as light as the bird on the wing, a great peace of mind takes possession of you.

But if you take the other path, the path of sin and wickedness, the inward ticking of conscience is transformed immediately, it is like the rumbling of thunder, or like the anguish of a painful burn. Then you suffer and are no longer happy, your brow darkens and your cheerfulness is gone. And you will not recover your cheerful frame of mind until you retrace your steps, until you leave the wrong path, and regain the right one.

Dear children, the little girl just mentioned had good reason to be grateful to the good fairy for the gift she received from her,

because she was certain never to be in doubt of the right. How much more should you be grateful to God who has given you conscience, to lead you aright on the great journey of eternity. If you succeed in reaching paradise you will in reality owe it to your conscience, without which you would be like a ship without its compass, unable to make port. How greatly then should you appreciate having a conscience!

Yet this is not sufficient, and I am going to tell you now what you must do in regard to your conscience. When one possesses a valuable watch, there are these four things to be done with it. We should use it, wind it up, have it cleaned now and then, and keep it regulated. You have precisely these four things to do as regards your conscience.

First of all we should use it; the watch is made to tell the time, and not a second passes without its fulfilling its mission; but if we do not take it with us, if we leave it at home, it does not fulfil its purpose. It is thus with conscience, it points out instantly the good to be done and the evil to be avoided, but if we do not listen to it, what good is it to us? It does not fulfil its purpose. Those who do not make use of their conscience, offend God who has given it to them for their use.

The one who faithfully obeys the dictates of his conscience is called conscientious and not only before God but also among men it is regarded as a virtue to be conscientious. Therefore if you wish to command respect among your fellowmen, my dear children, you must be *conscientious;* that means you must always listen to the dictates of your conscience.

In the second place, in the same way as a watch has to be wound every day, we must daily do something similar to that with our conscience, and that is the examination at night. Never fail to

examine your conscience at the end of each day; awaken regret for your sins and make good resolutions. Otherwise it will go with your conscience as it does with a watch that is not wound, first of all it stops, then it rusts, and will not do its duty when needed. Thus because of neglect our conscience often is allowed to go to sleep; it gets rusty, as it were, and loses its sensitiveness, and then grave faults may be committed without the conscience being able to warn against them.

The third precaution to be taken with a watch is to have it cleaned from time to time, for dust will get in gradually; and so it is with your conscience, it must be cleansed now and then, because the tarnish of sin will interfere with its work. You understand, of course, that I speak here of *Confession*, I will not do more now than allude to it, but that simple mention will not be useless if it makes you understand that frequent Confession is most important, as it purifies the conscience and keeps it in working order.

Finally, the fourth precaution is to keep the watch well regulated; see that it keeps exact time. The conscience, too, should be well regulated, it must be sensitive. Some watches tell only the hours and minutes, but not the smaller seconds. Thus some consciences tell only of coarse faults, crimes, grievous sins, but that is all; they do not concern themselves with smaller offenses.

You must not have a conscience of this kind, you must be able to recognize and detest everything that is bad, even the smallest faults, and little sins, and you must also be on the alert for everything that is good, even little acts of virtue and the fulfilment of small duties. This is the work of a good, sensitive, and well-regulated conscience.

Take good care of your conscience, dear children, and train it well, which is the object of the lessons in your Catechism and of

the instruction you receive here. It is our most cherished wish to help you in forming a good conscience, and, like the fairy in the story told you at the beginning of this talk, we are convinced that we could not make you a more suitable, a better or more valuable present.

X.—Good Will.

You have often heard at holy Mass the words "Gloria in excelsis" as they were sung by the angels at the birth of Our Lord: Glory to God on high, and peace to men of good will! Peace must then be the summing up of all good, and especially of all good made available to the soul of man by the birth of Jesus. And to whom is this precious gift promised? To men of good will; no others can have part in it, but no one whosoever gives proof of good will is excluded. What a precious thing therefore good will is. But are they very numerous of whom it may be said that they have good will? We can be very easily deceived in this respect. Good will consists in having good and steadfast intentions.

Good intentions, that is, we must seek the good and intend to do it, first and last. A child with a good will is one who sincerely strives to do what is right. When a lesson is to be studied, an exercise to be written, he does the work cheerfully. He does not hurry just to get through with his task, he is not satisfied with knowing his lesson only nearly, he wants to do what is right in the right way.

The child with a good will sets himself to work on the task imposed, he wants to do it as well as he possibly can. He may not always succeed, but at least you can perceive that an effort has been made. We find evidences of this good will in him also when such serious obligations confront him, as prayer, the practice of Christian virtues, the correction of faults, and preparation for first Holy Communion; through all this the child of good will remains faithful to himself, he sincerely desires to do his duty, his intentions are good. And while sincere his good will is also steadfast, not

fitful and changeable, there is no mistaking of good desires, good notions, for good will. Good desires and good notions are all very well in themselves, but they are not real good will. In order to acquire good will we must in the first place have the resolution, we must will, and will seriously and firmly.

You can not say that they have a good will, for instance, of children who content themselves with not resisting good influences, who let themselves willingly be induced by a favorable example to do good, but who, if left to themselves, or exposed to evil influences, either remain idle or even take the evil path. There is not good will in such a child, it is rather no will at all; just foolish imitation such as a parrot would be capable of. Alas, what a large number of children imagine that they are possessed of good will just because they are held to do good, because it is made easy for them to do good, so that they feel a real intention to be good. It does not take a great deal to shake good intentions which are not backed by a firm good will.

Every excess is of evil and while you must have a good will it must not be allowed to become obstinacy. To forget all prudence and common sense in the desire to do good is not a mark of proper good will. Obstinate persons often have the best of intentions, they may sincerely wish to do right, but they want it done in their own way, according to their own humor, they will insist that their way is best. Say what you will to them, show how it would be better to act otherwise, you will gain nothing, they are obstinate, and will not change their opinion even though injury may follow.

Good will is tractable, it submits to reason. He of good will seeks the good so sincerely that he yields his personal views if he is shown the means to attain its end with certainty. Good intentions

at all times firm and resolute, but without obstinacy, such are meant by good will.

Endeavor, my dear children, to be possessed of this ideal good will, and then surely the promises made to those of good will, will be fulfilled in you. We have examples of men of good will who did great things by applying themselves to do their task thoroughly and faithfully, even where more clever or intelligent than they had failed. But above all, in the sight of our Master and Sovereign Judge, the eternal God, we may say that it is only good will that really counts. He will reward us, not according to the number and importance of good works done, but for the amount of good will that we have shown in performing them. We read in the Gospel how the servant to whom the Master gave five talents, brought back five others, another one to whom were given two, brought back two, yet notwithstanding this difference in the importance of their task, they both received the same reward, because both had given evidence of the same good will.

Strive, therefore, to be children of good will, to be good and faithful servants, and, as Our Saviour has promised, even if your good will has no other object than little things, they will help you to accomplish greater ones, and with good will the servants of this earth will become kings in the glorious realm of peace, with which God will reward those of good will.

XI. Christian Prudence.

At first glance it may, perhaps, appear strange to speak of prudence to children of your years, considering the fact that prudence is generally found only at a more mature age.

In a certain cathedral in the old country there is to be seen a statue of Wisdom; this statue has two faces, one the wrinkled countenance of old age, and the other the face of a young girl. The sculptor wished to imply thereby that wisdom is proper to all ages. And so is prudence, as a form of wisdom, proper to all ages. Of course it can not be as fully developed in a child as in an older person, but nevertheless it ought to be found in the child, that it may begin its wholesome influence. What, then, is the mission of prudence? (I am speaking, of course, of Christian prudence.) You will readily understand it, if you call to mind that we are but travelers here on earth as you have been told many times; and prudence is a necessary virtue for travelers.

What do we mean by a prudent traveler? In the first place we mean a traveler who is anxious to find the right road and to follow it, the road that will lead him in safety to the goal of his journey. He avoids all roads which deviate from the right path, he makes sure of the right road at all the turns and crossings, he looks at the sign posts and if necessary he inquires for direction. My children, you also are engaged on a journey, the journey to eternity; be prudent therefore in your proceeding and in the selection of the road you take. Are you mindful of the goal which you must reach? Very little, I am afraid. Here then is the first imprudence. You are traveling upon this earth without much thinking as to where you want to travel. You are on the way to eternity. Heaven is your goal, and if you miss this goal your whole life will have been lived in vain, you

will be wretchedly lost eternally. What a terrible misfortune! To attain this goal, then, there is a path upon which we must walk and which the Catechism points out in the words: we must know, love, and serve God. This is the only right road, and away from it there is no salvation. All others are paths of perdition and they lead us astray from the right path. Let us see now what is meant by a prudent child. A prudent child, is, like the traveler before mentioned, always concerned about following the right path. He asks himself, am I not going astray? Are my words, actions, and general conduct helping me along the road to salvation? The prudent child thinks of this as seriously and as frequently as he can. While thus he is serious about serious things, this does not prevent him in the least from being cheerful, gladsome and eager to play. But he is not frivolous, not wild and boisterous like many children are who never give thought to serious matters, who seem to live with the sole idea of having a good time, whose brain is not exercised by thoughts about more important matters than eating and playing. Poor children, what will become of them? They will grow up without acquiring the ability and the habit of reflecting, of taking seriously things that are serious. Caring not what path they take, it is greatly to be feared that they will not resist the temptation to take the easy path that leads to perdition.

You see, dear children, how necessary it is to be prudent travelers, to exercise continually the prudence which consists in knowing positively where one is going, and of keeping faithfully to the path which leads there.

There is another thing a prudent traveler does. He is not only anxious about the right path, he is also anxious to avoid any dangers that may beset that path; quagmires are met with, precipices have to be skirted, and robbers may be waiting to do injury. For

this reason the careful traveler advances with great caution, he looks about to see where his steps are leading him, he anticipates a possible attack by the enemy, he prepares to defend himself, he keeps away from the brink of the precipice for fear of being taken with a sudden weakness that would expose him to the danger of falling.

Have you not already understood the lesson which this picture teaches? Dear children, you, too, are exposed to many dangers on the path through life; dangers of being drawn into evil! Bad examples, bad advice, temptations of all sorts, these are the precipices over which you may fall, these are the hiding places whence the enemy emerges. What prudence must we be possessed of, if we would escape all these perils! With what caution and fear must we proceed! How reckless the imprudent children who expose themselves carelessly to dangers as if they were certain to pass through them well and safely. They are presumptuous, forgetting the words of Holy Scripture that: "He who loves the danger shall perish in it." Sooner or later they will be victims of their imprudence; imprudence, for instance, in reading bad books, bad newspapers, or wilfully looking at improper pictures or posters. A prudent child will carefully avoid such things because he knows that wilfully reading a bad book, looking with pleasure at an improper picture, is sinful. It is likewise an imprudence, to associate with evil companions, who by example and advice lead to sinful actions. The prudent child keeps away from such companions, knowing that association with them will almost surely mean falling into sin.

Dear children, be prudent in all things, and pray to God for grace, that you may conquer the temptations that beset your path. You will thus become brave little travelers on the journey to heaven, guided and guarded by Christian prudence, and you may be sure that the good Lord, who sent His angel to guide the pious Tobias on his journey, will also give His grace and assistance to you.

XII.—Frankness.

What a fine word this is! Frankness! How we like to hear it from others, and how we like to use it ourselves. It must be because the word stands for so much that is good and noble. To be frank is to be straightforward, sincere, honest in manner and speech, free from cunning and falseness, etc. Frankness is indeed a beautiful trait. Frankness is like a light that gives a halo and transfigures those that practice it into most charming persons. You should, therefore, endeavor to be frank! First let us ask in what frankness consists? It may be defined as a disposition which induces us not to seek to deceive others, and this disposition may proceed either from our mind or from our heart.

It should be well remembered that frankness does not exclude discretion and prudence; it does not require us to wear our heart upon our sleeve, as the saying is, to proclaim bluntly all our thoughts and all our feelings, as one would display merchandise in the front of a store. Not at all, it is often very advisable and very proper to keep to one's self that which we think. It is not always good to tell everything we know. You will therefore avoid to be of those talkative children who blabber everything that happens to come to their minds, blurting it out no matter where and when. Great trouble is frequently caused by unthinking people and children who speak of everything they know, or happen to hear, who wound the sensibilities of persons, bring about quarrels and discord between good friends, etc.

There are things, therefore, that it will not be prudent to speak of, and you must not suppose that you must tell everything you think of, this would be a serious fault.

Thus we should be silent, for instance, about everything that is

calculated to draw attention to ourselves, at least unless there is good reason to talk about such things. There is nothing so tiresome as a child who continually tries to keep people busy about his little self. Neither must we divulge the secrets of one's conscience, nor talk of the advice our confessors gave us, of sins we accused ourselves of, of the penance imposed upon us, of the resolutions we have made, etc. All these things, as Holy Scripture tells us, are the King's secrets; that is to say they are God's and should be treated with respect and secrecy.

After thus defining some subjects that must be guarded by silence, let us now turn to those about which we should be frank. It is really impossible to keep everything to ourselves, we can not live together without communicating to one another many of our thoughts and feelings. And speech is given us to lend expression to our thoughts or to the varied emotions of our soul. Now and again you write to your relations, to your friends; this is another way of expressing that which is hidden within us. And even if you neither write nor speak, your thoughts will be manifest by your actions, and by your conduct. There is not a move of your features, nor a glance of your eye, which does not reveal something of your thoughts. Well, then, this is the domain of frankness, it is here that frankness must rule supreme, and the different ways of expressing our thought should only be employed in the service of truth and never to deceive about your real thoughts and sentiments.

Frankness in word and letter; never write or speak a word contrary to truth. Falsehood is abominable, says Holy Scripture. Frankness in conduct and actions; to act in a way so as to make people attribute to us intentions which we do not possess is hypocrisy, another abominable thing. Frankness in countenance, in our manner; to avoid honesty in expression of the face, to affect a smile when

it is not meant, is dissimulation, which is as repulsive as it is deceitful.

Lying, hypocrisy, dissimulation are the three chief enemies of frankness, use your best endeavors in combating these enemies. And why is this so imporant? Because, in the first place, dear children, it is a question of moral beauty.

Do you wish to be ugly and repulsive, to everyone, God and men? The habits of lying, of dissimulation, of hypocrisy, are all the work of darkness and it is only the light of truth and sincerity that is lovely and a source of beauty. Behold the animals that fly from the light and roam by night: the mole, the owl, the bat, how ugly they are! They inspire us with a feeling of disgust, and so do the people that shun the light of truth. The mark of darkness is stamped upon their faces, and is seen in their eyes; they are objects of suspicion and of distrust.

Then again it is a question of the well being of the soul. If there is evil in us, a habitual fault, a tendency to sin, the soul is not healthy. Remedies must be administered by those to whom God has given charge of us, parents, teachers, confessors. These consist of exhortation, warning, even punishment if required by the circumstances. Such corrective measures are not agreeable and, in order to escape them, children sometimes lie. But, alas, while falsehood may in such instances protect against the incurred punishment, it will, on the other hand, deliver them to the evil habits which their guardians seek to correct. Having found a way to avoid immediate punishment for their evil actions, namely by lying, resistance against temptation weakens, the evil actions grow into strong, bad habits, and in addition the vice of lying is acquired.

It is for this reason that lying and dissimulating children so easily grow accustomed to vice. Their hypocrisy envelopes them in an

atmosphere of sin, and as they find a way of doing wrong without hindrance or punishment, they become more and more hardened in sin and sinful habits.

On the other hand, the child who is frank may sometimes forget himself, but as he is upright, and as he loves the truth, he admits his fault, confesses it, receives the counsel and the help of which he stands in need, and he rises up again from his unfortunate fall into sin.

You must, therefore, endeavor to be frank, dear children, and be frank with all people, for they all have the right to expect that you will not deceive them. To deceive any one is a gross insult, an injustice, often causing harm, and God forbids your doing such things. You will be frank especially with your parents; having received from God the charge of bringing you up, of advising and correcting you, they have consequently the greatest right to know your conduct, your faults, your tastes, your inclinations. It is their duty to seek the right means to bring you up in virtue, and it is for you to make this possible for them by placing confidence in them and by being truthful about all your thoughts and actions. It is understood, of course, that you must be sincere and frank toward your confessor in the acknowledgment of faults committed; here lying would be a crime, because in Confession we are speaking to God Himself, who is represented by the priest. You have been told of the dreadful consequences of falsehood in Confession, and how foolish it would be to lie to the priest who is there to pardon and not to condemn. He is a good friend who seeks to cleanse your soul of the dross of sin, and in order to do this, he must thoroughly know the condition of your soul.

I trust that you see now the importance of frankness in speech and action. God loves truth, and the devil is the father of lies and liars.

XIII.—Friendship.

My Dear Children: Amongst your companions there are surely some who please and attract you more than others, some with whom you find yourselves in sympathy, with whom you will more readily talk and play, and these you call your friends. You do not suspect every one to be bad, wicked and unworthy of affection; on the contrary, you are inclined to believe that very many are really good and deserving of your regard, and this is just. Still in this, as in all other things, there are rules to be obeyed, points to be considered, the disregard of which would render our friendships either positively dangerous or at least not so commendable as they ought to be.

Three qualities before all should be looked for in your friendships: they should be well chosen, sincere, and serious. Let us see what this means.

In the first place you should *choose* your friends, that is self-evident. We can not be the particular friend of everyone, without distinction; it would amount in the end to being no one's particular friend; therefore we make our choice of our particular friends. There is a right and a wrong manner of choosing and this is an important point.

Let us see how you choose your friends. This is frequently done blindly, on the first impulse, without thought or reflection; this boy, this girl pleases you, he or she is clean, cheerful and jolly, that suffices; in a few minutes you are friends! Yet how very unreasonable it is to act quickly in such matters, to settle them by looks, by pleasing ways. What is it really that you should like in your friend? Is it himself, or herself, or merely the smile, the voice, and

jolly ways? I think it should be himself. But you can not learn to know *him* or *her* within a few minutes, or days. A pleasant smile and cheerful ways are but exterior signs, giving no indication of character or heart; two children may resemble one another greatly by these characteristics, and yet be entirely dissimilar at heart. One may be intelligent, the other silly; one good-hearted, the other selfish; one conscientious, the other reckless; all this can not be told by the sound of the voice or by the color of the hair. Do not, therefore, be in a hurry to bestow your friendship; rather be observant; study and consider. Strive to know those whom you would make your friends, and act according to your observations.

But, you will ask, by what rules can I decide? What qualities must they possess whom I shall choose to be my friends? Well, there is one quality above all things necessary, and this is that he or she must be a good child, there must be a good will, a desire to shun evil and everything of a nature that would trouble your conscience. Just as soon as a companion shows a tendency to weaken your good resolutions and to incite you to bad actions, reject him; he is not the proper friend for you. He may be very clever, witty, lively—all this is possible, but he is all the more dangerous on this account. At all cost you must shake off his influence. Should you make a friend of him, he will gain an influence over you which you do not suspect, and the consequences will be evil.

It may be said that friendship is a deal, an exchange, between two souls; if the two friends are good they are mutually benefited by this barter, and both will become good. If, however, one of the friends is wicked, the result will be, as frequently happens in business when honest men deal with dishonest ones, the good people are duped and the dishonest ones have things their way. And thus it is with friendship, the good party is robbed of the good that

was in him, and the corrupt party will succeed in making his friend wicked like unto himself. Often we see good children falling into that pitfall of bad friendships and bad company, and through them losing their innocence, their piety, their good character.

Be very careful not to attach yourselves to bad companions, and to this end you must require above all that your friends be good children. Keep away from the others! After the point of good character is considered you may follow your preferences and choose, always among the good children, those by whom you are especially attracted. But if you want to be quite safe, it is well to examine what these attractions are, for very often we are attracted to others by their shortcomings, especially when these are in harmony with our own.

Like seeks like; the idle go preferably with the idle, the proud with the proud, the quarrelsome seek the quarrelsome. Being idle, proud, quarrelsome does not always mean that a child is really bad, and consequently these would not be dangerous friendships, in the sense before mentioned. Yet all the same we must not seek in the friendships which we make anything that will encourage or develop our own faults, and this is why it would be better for a child inclined to idleness to seek a companion who is industrious; a proud child may profitably associate with one of unassuming ways; a quarrelsome boy will be benefited by a peaceful companion; in this way things will be evenly balanced. Thus, two natures not possessing the same inclinations, nor the same good qualities, will derive profit from mutual association, the idle one, for instance, losing his idleness by associating with an industrious child, while this industrious child, who may be impulsive or vain, acquires from the idle child gentleness and modesty. This is a good bargain, and

when it becomes a question of choosing friends you will do well to consider the deal in this light.

Supposing now that your friendship has been well chosen, it must furthermore be *sincere.* I am very far from suspecting you of falseness, my dear children, on this head; it is not usual at your age to show friendship where you do not feel it; quite the contrary, you are generally moved too quickly by your feelings and impressions, and you are likely to act on them at once with sincerity, even to such an extent that at times your sincerity is imprudent. When you do not like a person, you perhaps show it more than you ought to; your parent may have had to reprove you at times when you showed too plainly that you did not care for certain persons. While I believe, therefore, that you are sincere when you show your friendship, I want to impress upon you that your sincerity must not be a matter of expression only, but a matter of the heart. When you say that you like this companion or that friend, are you not deceiving yourself? Are you quite sure that this is really so? It is very easy to be mistaken as to one's true feelings. Some children may imagine that they like others, while all the time they really only like themselves. Let us see what this means. Tell me, my dear child, do you ever think of pleasing this good friend of yours, of rendering him some little service? Do you want him to be good and happy, to make progress at school? Do you feel worried when he is in trouble? Are you ready and willing to go to his assistance, to encourage and console him? In a word, are you capable of forgetting yourself, if necessary, to make a sacrifice in proof of your friendship? If this is not so, if in your friend's society you seek alone your own pleasure, the fun of playing and chatting with such a companion, if he must be always at your service, conforming in all things to your ideas, you had better

put aside the word friendship, for it is nothing but selfishness. You are not a real friend, then, but a self-willed person who is willing to have a friend if he can lord it over this friend.

I think that you have understood now what I mean by sincerity. Have a thorough dislike of selfishness, and most particularly of that form of selfishness which assumes the form of false friendship.

Finally, my dear children, your friendships should be *serious.* We must be serious in all our undertakings. Seriousness is the opposite of frivolity: we must never be frivolous. To be frivolous is to strive incessantly and solely for that which amuses and pleases. Amusement and pleasure are good in their way at the proper time and within the bounds of reason. They are no obstacle to our being serious, but the desire of amusement and pleasure all the time, and without reserve, is the sign of a frivolous mind and heart. Do not be frivolous in your friendships; that is, do not seek in friendship only pleasure and amusement. It is understood that you should be glad with your friends, and that they should be the companions in your recreation, games and walks, but it is also understood that your friendship must not have that aim only. The great and principal aim of true friendship is *to help* one another to become better, more virtuous, more obedient, more pious. In the Lives of the Saints we find examples of friends who by helping one another became saints; so, for instance, St. Gregory and St. Basil. This should be our ideal of true friendship.

What a glorious sight is that of two friends leaning upon one another in order to walk the good path. What easy progress will they make! How strong they will feel against bad examples and temptations! When standing alone we are afraid, but with a strong friend at our side we fear nothing; there is the mutual encouragement by word and example, the mutual benefit to one another.

How happy your teachers would be if they perceived this sort of friendship among you! How worried they will be, on the contrary, when they notice indications of a frivolous friendship between two children. They know that such frivolous friendships are not only useless, but even likely to breed bad and even sinful habits. Friendship of a frivolous nature is no longer a flower shedding perfume and delight; it resembles rather the poisonous growth which breeds sickness and death.

In conclusion let me repeat to you the words which a pious youth once addressed to his friend: "I hope," he wrote, "that between us there is a third; and that this third is Our Lord Jesus." Truly this is the secret of good friendship, of well chosen, sincere, serious friendship, namely, that it be worthy to admit Jesus, the Divine Friend, to be the third party to the union.

Go, then, and remodel your present friendship on these lines, and bear these things in mind when forming friendships hereafter.

XIV.—Good Reading.

There are numerous striking resemblances between the functions of the human soul and those of the body, and for the most part we picture the functions of the soul by comparison with those of the body. So we say for instance of the soul that it sees, breathes, grows, makes progress, is anxious, weary, is injured, is benefited, rises up, and so on. All these words signify functions, sentiments, or sensations of which the soul is capable in its way. They are described by names that we give to similar functions, sensations, etc., of the body; it would be difficult to describe them otherwise, and, besides, these terms are quite correct, and express exactly what they are meant to convey. For this reason, dear children, desiring to speak a few words to you on the subject of your reading, I do not hesitate to take for my text that oft repeated saying: "Reading is the food of the soul."

Food of the soul! Nothing can be more true; when you read you are taking food; the book that you are reading is the food, your mind takes hold of it, it absorbs this food as material nourishment enters the body. And then what happens? See how perfect the comparison is. The food of the body, bread, meat, etc., what becomes of it after you have eaten it? It changes itself into your substance, it becomes flesh, blood, muscles.

And the books you read, or rather the ideas, pictures, teachings that are contained in that book, what becomes of them? They enter into your mind and soul and will form thought, principles, character. Occasionally some particular idea will occur to your imagination. Some inclination will make itself felt in your mind; they will seem a matter of course to you, and you would not think the idea or inclination strange nor think of asking yourself whence

they came. Yet that very idea, that image, that inclination, is produced by some particular reading of days gone by, of which you do not retain an exact remembrance. Your soul has partaken of the food, the contents of the book passes into your spiritual organism, just as the substance of bread passes into your bodily organism. Reading is to the mind what eating is to the body. From this, my dear children, let us draw some simple and practical, but nevertheless important rules with regard to your reading. Bodily health will be sustained if we eat, eat wholesome things, and eat with reason; in the same way the health of the soul is furthered if we read, read good books, and read with reason.

In the first place we should read for the same reason that we eat, in order to thrive, but with this difference, that if we do not take food for our body we shall starve and die, whilst mind and soul may be nourished by other means than reading, so, for instance, listening to instruction, to sermons, to advice.

In former times very little reading was done, and people received instruction chiefly by listening to learned teachers. But in our days reading has become almost indispensable. Everybody reads: there are innumerable things that can hardly be learned at all except by reading, we can not well neglect reading without remaining far behind others. Intercourse with people, business affairs, the tendency of the times, everything nowadays prescribes or encourages reading. You will ask nothing better than to be able to read, many of you no doubt having a decided taste for books; this is well, provided that it does not exceed sensible bounds.

We must acknowledge the usefulness, the necessity even of reading, for instruction, and especially religious instruction. Indeed, we wish you, my dear children, to devote more time than you do to reading for religious instruction. This is especially important when

children receive religious instruction by teachers only once a week, in Sunday school. Unless the lessons received in Sunday school are supplemented during the week by religious reading, they are entirely insufficient for you to be really well versed in your Religion. It is therefore necessary for you to read good and interesting books, as Bible history, explanations of the gospels, the history of the Church, the lives of the saints, or other good works written for your instruction. You must not suppose that this kind of reading is dry, quite the reverse, it is replete with attraction and interest if you only take it up in the right spirit, namely, in the spirit of the love of God, and to gain information about His Holy Religion.

You should read then! Read the good books that are given you now and then. Most of you have some good books home. Do not be like persons who have a larder filled with good things to eat, who nevertheless starve because they will not use them. You must have better sense than that, read the good books that have been given you, with the intention of instructing yourselves thoroughly in your Religion. If you have not such books ask for them, your parents and teachers will be only too glad to lend them to you.

Secondly, it is not sufficient to eat, we must eat wholesome things; namely, nourishing and healthful food. Although everyone will admit the wisdom of this rule, not everyone follows it. There are persons who will eat only sweet things, such as pastry and candies, which are hardly wholesome and not very nourishing; these things are not good for the body. Others partake of foods quite unwholesome, highly-spiced dishes, indigestible viands, etc., and such persons poison rather than nourish their system. It is exactly the same thing as regards reading. Certain kinds of reading may be described as sweets for the mind, we may without harm take some sweets and eat a little pastry if we first give good nourishing food

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